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THE MOUNTAINEERS OF MIDDLE TENNESSEE.

THE district of which some account is here offered lies in the southern part of Middle Tennessee, and belongs to the wide plateaus known familiarly as the Cumberland Ridge. The traveller who reaches the brow of this ridge, by one of the untravelled but beautiful mountain roads, is rewarded for his toilsome ascent over rolling stones and treacherous wash-outs by a glorious outlook over valley and mountain. He may chance to stand upon a spot commanding a view of parts of Alabama and Georgia as well as many miles of Tennessee's rich valley land. The plains below are covered mainly with natural growth, but are relieved here and there by groups of green grain fields or squares of ploughed land, varying in shades of red from the brilliant tone of a wet brick to dark reddish purple. The mountain chain upon which he stands stretches out to right and left as far as the eye can reach. Its chief characteristic is the level line of its top. This is as true of the near as of the distant portions, where one might expect to see the horizon line unbroken. The sides, however, are deeply serrated by broad, jutting spurs. The gulches between them show the action of water, and the cliffs bear the marks of erosion. These explain the flat sandy top of the mountain, sometimes five and sometimes fifteen miles broad. This table-land is covered with a dense forest of tall, slender trees. A dweller in one of these gulches, or "coves," as he would call them, being invited to give his opinion as to whether this tract of land had ever been at the bottom of the sea, answered that, "Ef it twar so, twar before his pappy's or his granpappy's time."

Looking along the sides of the mountain one may chance to see a slender column of smoke, marking either an illicit "still" for the manufacture of a modest amount of "wild-cat" whiskey, or the hearthstone of a "covite." The former terms carry with them no flavor of reproach to the ear of the mountaineer, but the latter is never applied in the hearing of the person so described, except as an intentional affront. The "covite" considers himself a mountaineer, but the dweller on the top of the mountain recognizes strongly the distinction, though he may not analyze the difference.

The coves were the first points settled, probably because they afforded shelter both from the weather, which is often severe, and from the pursuing attentions of former neighbors in the valley, whose ideas of equity were unduly warped by a too thorough appreciation of merely legal technicalities. The descendants of these first settlers now occupy the ground first cleared by them, and the courteous

mountaineer just mentioned, who so delicately veiled his probable conviction that his geological questioner was a "plum eejit," might have made his point still stronger by presenting the same evidence from his "granpappy's granpappy." But the interest of the average mountaineer in public or private history seldom carries him far enough to inquire beyond the generations with whom he has a speaking acquaintance. Little is known about the time of the first settlements. They are supposed to have been very early. There are no tombstones, and the only date I have ever seen about their dwellings was a rude sculpture of the figures 1749 on a stone in a fireplace. Reaching up and touching it I asked, "What is that, Sallie Arkansas?" (Sallie Arkansas is the first half of a name undertaken eighteen years ago, when the father of the six weeks old infant left for Arkansas, expecting to send for his family later.)

"Why, ther ciphers, ain't they? I heern some on um say thet they war pot thar when the chimley war abein' raised. But I *reckon* not. Ef they war, I reckon they'd have had to have had a 'nuff sight bigger chance of fire logs them times than thar's ever been 'round yere sence, before they'd a been that pestered for somethin' to wheelte that they'd a lit on rock. I reckon hits some Injun foolishness."

There are comparatively few traditions. Those existing usually rise above the plane of mere records of births, deaths, and marriages, migrations and their causes, town councils and church disagreements. They are apt to be concerned exclusively with family traits, and incidents illustrative of the courage, generosity, skill at the rifle or loom, acuteness in trade, or the opposites of these qualities. The pride of birth, as well as the repose, of the Vere de Veres, is the mountaineer's also. A young man or maiden of matrimonial aspirations would find it a serious drawback to belong to "white-livered kin," especially if the coveted partner occupied the normal position in being allied to "good fightin' stock."

In a little impromptu fight which I accidentally witnessed between five or six men belonging to families at feud with each other, the first war-cry uttered was, "Come on! I'm kin to the ——s," naming a family who each year enlarged the roll of widows in the State. "Who's a keerin'?" was shouted back; "I'm kin to the ——s," naming another family of equally enviable reputation. I might add, by the way, that as it was growing dark a lantern was held by the constable of the district in order that the men might fight with as much intelligence as zeal. The officer of the law had done his duty, at the first gleam of pistol and bowie-knife, by shouting: "I say thar, boys, pot up yer weepsons, pot up yer weepsons and fight it out with yer fisteses." After much dubiousness of all concerned as to the completeness of the surrender of "weepsons," individual preferences for "shootin'

fixin's" were waived in favor of "fisteses" and the majesty of the law.

The habitation of the mountaineer is invariably built of logs. There are but two models, the "single" and the "double" log cabin. A single house is usually constructed by a man at his marriage. The logs are about eighteen inches in diameter, and twenty or thirty feet long. The corners are neatly dovetailed, and the structure rests on an underpinning of stout posts, cross-sections of some thick log. The roof is covered with home-made shingles from two to three feet long. The chimney stands at one end and outside of the house. The lower portion is built of primitive but picturesque masonry. The upper third is of sticks plastered with mud. There is but one door, and if it possess hinges they are made of wood. The single window about two feet square, and often without glass, is placed in the end, near the chimney.

The choice of a site is governed by the location of a spring. The house is often placed so that at noon the sun will shine in the doorway according to a straight line, thus supplying the place of a clock, if one were necessary among such accurate guessers of the time of day. A large flat rock may be chosen for a site, and a part of it left unfloored for a hearthstone. The portion of it outdoors serves as a paved doorway, in which natural or artificial holes take the place of drinking basins for chickens. The interior of the house contains a few pieces of necessary furniture of domestic manufacture. There is no cooking-stove, and the utensils for use in the fireplace are few. The angle of the roof serves as a store-room, shelves being placed inside along the line of the eaves, very much like the upper berth of a sleeping car. Here one may find any possession of the family, from an ox-bow to a snuff-box, that is not in immediate use. The ample bed, and trundle-bed underneath, are covered with patchwork quilts, each pattern having its own name.

As means and family increase, a second house, precisely like the first, is built facing it, and from six to ten feet away. The two are connected by an open covered porch. This porch is often made large enough to accommodate the loom. It is the pleasantest part of the dwelling. There is always a breeze, and it is there that the pride of the family, the water bucket, stands on its own special bench, properly alienated from the family washbasin, and the flat gourd beside it filled with home-made soap. This bucket is of red cedar, bound with brightly polished brass hoops. A well-formed gourd, scraped to delicate thinness and scrupulously clean, serves as a drinking cup. Both gourd and cedar add a rural flavor to the water. But if one would drink as wisely as willingly from this enticing cup, he needs to have a previous acquaintance with it. Humiliation

is the lot of the hypercritical alien who places his lips at the presumably unused spot near the handle. This handle is the neck of the gourd, with an opening at each end, for the sake of cleanliness. Through this accurately but unconsciously aimed aqueduct, the incautious drinker receives outside of his throat the contents of the uplifted gourd.

A visitor riding up to one of these houses is announced by the fierce baying of the host's black-eared hounds. He does not attempt to dismount, but shouts out the usual greeting: "Hello there!" At this the hounds become frantic, spring upon and fall back from the broken rail fence. The rider remains on the discreet side of it, cutting apologetically at the dogs when they threaten to violate all precedent and invade the stranger's territory outside the fence. Presently a man emerges from the house. He wears no suspenders, inasmuch as there is always time for the inevitable process of hitching up the trowsers. He advances with solemn cordiality, that being the proper attitude toward either friend or stranger. Either receives the same first word: —

"Won't ye light an' come in?"

The stranger, if an acquaintance, will probably answer, —

"Waal, call off yer dogs. I ain't a feelin' no call to make dog meat outen myself this time in the mornin'."

The dogs have meanwhile been quieted by the threatening gestures and contemptuous railing of their master: "Get in the house till ye git more sense. Lie deown, Buck, or I'll knock ye deown. Jes' look at that eejit critter Nig with his har on eend, like he war a tellin' a painter (panther) howdy. 'Light and come in. Nary one of um ud tech ye, unless it mought be that black pup over yon away. He's powerful presumjus when the folks ain't around."

All this is said with great deliberation, and without animation. The visitor dismounts, and the horse is immediately taken by one of the silent, expectant children waiting at a distance, their eager excitement concealed by a gentle gravity. The mother comes to the door and nods unsmilingly. Father, mother, and children are all dressed in cloth made in the loom that stands on the porch or in the little "shed-room" at the back. The boys wear trowsers of jeans reaching from ankles to arms, and shirts of blue and white cotton check. The girls wear skirts to their ankles, gathered at the top into a round waist innocent of fitting. The hair of the younger girls is "bobbed," cut off at the neck in front and behind. The older girls wear theirs "roached" (combed back straight), and fastened in a loose knot at the back of the head with a "tucking comb" — a back comb without a top. The mother and the older daughters dress alike. The children vanish for a moment, but by the time the visitor

reaches the single block step of the "gallery" they reappear at the other side of it, having made a circuit of the house in order to compass their desire to lose no word or gesture of the visitor, and to avoid passing before him, or following him like the now obsequious hounds, — a comparison they have heard. As they stand on the ground at the gallery's edge, quiet, alert, unconscious and therefore unembarrassed, waiting gravely to be noticed, they might serve as a model of good breeding to many a drawing-room favorite. The mountaineer's children are preëminently well-bred.

The lady of the house is usually addressed first by the guest. He makes some pleasant remark about the appearance of the family, or perhaps a delicate allusion to the past charms of the matron. "Why, Mizz —, how you hev broke sence I wuz yer las'." The possible sting of this remark is all counteracted by its being said in that indescribably tender, drawling intonation the mountaineer uses when he means to be gentle.

"Thet purty little trick over yon away favors her ma as she useter look." This is taken as the signal for a general introduction.

"This ees Ma-amie, thet un's Lu-u-lar, thet un's We-e-lie," and so on, until the pet of the family is reached, and "thet's the mean un." The "mean un's" downcast eyes twinkle at this sally, the little brown hands are pressed closely together, and the pigeon-toed little feet shift consciously on the hard-beaten ground around the doorway. The children preserve their earnest silence until directly addressed by the visitor, when they answer without further urging.

Any business to be transacted is preceded by a decorous silence. Nothing so offends the good taste of the mountaineer as vulgar haste. The initial courtesies of the occasion being over, the two men stroll off toward the fence, draw out their knives, mount the fence, whittle and talk. If, after the colloquy is over, the guest refuses all invitations to the next meal, or to stay all night, the horse is brought around, "baited" and resaddled, and the visitor mounts and rides off, not forgetting to invite the whole family to "drap in ef there a passin' his way."

The social side of the mountaineer is very charming. He is perfectly at ease without being self-important. He makes few blunders, and ignores those that other people make; indeed, he is always considerate of other people's feelings. His conversation is characterized by a gentle humor, tinged with sarcasm, and whatever he says gains a charm from his peculiar drawl and intonation. Whole phrases may be elided, but every syllable of every word used is dwelt on with solemn deliberation. He seldom argues and never contradicts, for to contradict is equivalent to "ginin a man the lie;" an intolerable affront, which can only be wiped out by knuckles or rifle.

An angry mountaineer is not a pleasant spectacle. He retains his outward composure, giving no sign by gesture or raised voice of the passion within. His drawl is slower than ever, his downcast eyes narrow to gleaming slits, his lips wear a sarcastic smile, and his hand is steady. I saw a man in this mood sit all day on a wood-pile holding the lock of his gun under his coat to protect it from the rain until the proper moment for its use arrived. Knowing him well, I asked him what he was doing.

"I'm a-fixin' to drap that little tow-headed fiste when he comes along yere with Sallie's young un." Sallie is a stepdaughter, who has made an unfortunate marriage.

"But suppose you hit the child?"

"I ain't aimin' to hit the child."

"But you might do it by mistake."

"Hit's his pappy I'm arter."

The father, being warned, came by another way. When the watcher found he had been out-manceuvred, he showed no sign either of exasperation or disappointment. He came to our house to get something for his sick wife, and I said, "Well, I'm glad you did n't get a chance to shoot." He looked in another direction and drawled slowly, "He's rotten enough to spile, but I reckon he'll keep."

The affair is not yet terminated, owing to complications of little interest to outsiders.

It would be very unfair to this man to tell one of the many such incidents in which he plays a principal part, without stating also that he is a model husband and father, a gentle, loyal friend, an industrious workman, and thoroughly honest. The five or six men who had fallen victims to "Old Lize," as he calls his gun, were men who were a continual menace to the community, and whose illegal execution all who knew the facts felt to be based upon a primitive sense of justice. These occurrences are not of recent date, only the latest one being within my own recollection. A few days previous to this affair, the mountaineer in question said of the offender:—

"Hit do seem a peety thet thet low deown shote kaint stay whar he belong at. I hate powerful to be disobleegin', but ef he comes devilmentin' areound me again hit seems like I've jes' natchully got him to kill."

The religion of the mountaineer is of the strictly orthodox type, and the verbal expression of it at least permeates their daily life. It is the most important adjunct of a sale of chickens or "gyardin truck." Last summer, as a final convincing proof to a dubious buyer on the back steps, I overheard the stalwart pedlar say:—

"Why look yere, Mizz —, I would n't say them chickens war anything they warn't for nothin' on the top side o' sand. Don't I

know thet as I'm standin' yere the good Lord above is a lookin' plum into my heart and a jedgin' all my actes and doos?"

Within the limits of a single paper it is impossible to give more than a glimpse here and there of a people so unique as these mountaineers of Middle Tennessee. Charles Egbert Craddock is their faithful portrait-painter. I have chosen only one small portion of the territory for the subject-matter of this slight sketch, and I have not attempted to be thorough in any one direction. The types I have chosen are such as exist entirely removed from contact with higher civilization.

The opening of mines on the mountain top, the establishment of schools for the sons and daughters of wealthy parents in the far South, and the building of summer hotels, are furnishing the student of mountaineer character with interesting data for speculation concerning the evolution of this interesting people. The outlook is hopeful. They are keen observers, and they learn readily and silently. Ten or twelve years ago, a boy stopping in front of our wooden cottage, of ordinary railroad construction, was so fixed with amazement at what he described, upon his return home, as "a plum palace with glass winders in it," that we mistook him for an idiot. He married a mountain girl soon afterward, and he lives now in a pretty two-story white frame house, with carpeted floors and beriboned curtains.

There is but small ground for the sentimental fear that the mountaineer will become vulgarized by contact with the outer world. The dignity of the mountaineer is unassailable. He may be culpable, tiresome, exasperating, pathetic, but he is never ridiculous.

As a rule the mountaineers easily learn the habit of industry. They are not unreasonably tenacious of their customs, and the most serious complaint society has against them, their lawlessness, disappears before the completer enforcement of civil law obtainable in a more populous community.

Adelene Moffat.